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FIRST COME LOVE AND UNDERSTANDING.

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AS A RESULT OF A STUDY BY THE ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ON THE NEEDS OF MIGRANT CHILDREN, A GRANT WAS OBTAINED FOR THE PURPOSE OF ESTABLISHING A SPECIAL SUMMER SCHOOL PROGRAM FOR MIGRANT YOUTH IN THE EXTREMELY ECONOMICALLY DEPRESSED SPRINGDALE, ARKANSAS, SCHOOL DISTRICT. THIS SITE WAS CHOSEN BECAUSE OF ITS CLOSE PROXIMITY TO A LARGE MIGRANT LABOR CAMP AND THE CHARACTERIZATION OF ITS SCHOOLS AS HAVING AN EXTREMELY HIGH DROPOUT RATE (AS HIGH AS 50 PERCENT IN THE ALL-NEGRO CHILDRESS HIGH SCHOOL AND BETWEEN 10 AND 15 PERCENT IN THE FORMERLY ALL WHITE WYNNE HIGH SCHOOL). MOST YOUNGSTERS IN THIS CATEGORY ARE REQUIRED TO ABANDON SCHOOL IN ORDER TO ASSUME A LARGE SHARE OF THE FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE FAMILY. EMPHASIS OF THE SPECIAL SUMMER SCHOOL PROGRAM HAS BEEN ON THE CREATION OF AN ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH SUCCESS MAY BE EASILY ACHIEVED. AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THE PROGRAM IS A SERIES OF HOME VISITATIONS BY THE TEACHERS INVOLVED TO ENABLE THEM TO GAIN INSIGHTS INTO THE BACKGROUND OF THE CHILDREN SO THAT HELP IN THE FORM OF FOOD, CLOTHING, AND NEEDED MEDICAL ATTENTION MAY BE DISPENSED WITH MAXIMUM EFFECTIVENESS. PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES HAVE MET WITH VERY GOOD SUCCESS IN MANY INSTANCES. THIS ARTICLE APPEARS IN THE "SOUTHERN EDUCATION REPORT," VOL. 3, NO. 7, MARCH, 1968. (DA)

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FIRST COME LOVE AND UNDERSTANDING

When Mike Zotti, a transplanted Yankee who still has traces of a New Jersey accent, sent out a memorandum about the first Springdale, Ark., Summer School for Migrant Children, he wrote unabashedly:

"Our main purpose is to furnish the successful atmosphere for these students that eludes them during regular school. We furnish food service, medical service, educational service, but even more important we furnish love and understanding."

Neither love nor understanding was spelled out in the budget on the detailed forms for the $108,000 program financed under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Zotti's teachers were not sure what he had in mind. A few of them balked when he prescribed a minimum of two home visits during the summer term. They thought it was exhausting enough to parcel out large quantities of love and understanding during the normal school day to children starved for such attention. But the homevisiting time after school came to be the most important part of the school day. Teachers went, not twice, but many times into the homes of some of the problem children. These visits turned out to be a better course in what a poverty environment can do to a child than any number of in-service lectures.

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One junior-high-school teacher, returning to school with her principal after a visit to a particularly depressing, unkempt rural home, wept quietly all the way back to town. She tried to

explain that it is one thing to see a girl in an ill-fitting dress with her hair curled too tightly doing sixth-grade work in the ninth grade. You become impatient with her for not performing better. It is quite another matter when you see the unpapered, dirty walls of her living room, the chicken strolling through the kitchen and the flies everywhere. Then you meet a retarded brother who only makes sounds and you hear the girl's mother complain that the girl reads too much. With so little going for her at home, why should the girl try at all at school?

Junior-high-school coach Scott Van Hoose, a slender, energetic young man with a blond crew cut, was chosen to be principal of the Springdale Summer School for Migrant Children because of his previous interest in disadvantaged youngsters. There was his friend, Martin, for instance, an eighth-grader who attended the summer school at the insistence of Van Hoose.

"Martin was on the road to becoming a dropout when I first saw him standing in the door to my office at the gym," recalled Van Hoose (whose name rhymes with "noose"). "He had been in trouble with the police for stealing money from newspaper coin boxes. I invited him to go on a basketball trip with us to Fort Smith on the bus and that did it. He rode his first elevators and he was amazed to see the table at the restaurant set up for the team after the game. He had never been in a restaurant before. Martin wanted a new bicycle, and I helped him arrange with the store to put it in layaway so that he could pay for it himself with the money he gets from his job at a grocery store. It cost about $50 and he now lacks only $5 of completing his payments."

Springdale operates on a three-track system-honors for the bright students, general for the average achievers and practical for

the slow children. As a result of his summer school experience and the extra help from sympathetic teachers, Martin will be moving out of the practical into the general program next year. He has made up his mind that he wants to stay in school until he finishes.

Another eighth-grader named Jim was not so lucky.

"We have an archaic state law which requires children to remain in school only until they are 16 or finish the eighth grade," said Zotti. "Around here, we start losing many of them as soon as they reach one or the other of those marks."

Zotti and Van Hoose found Jim one night working with a chicken-catching crew a year after he disappeared from school. Jim began catching chickens while he was still in the eighth grade. He was covered with dirt and chicken feathers and he was perspiring when Zotti and Van Hoose stopped by the poultry farm. He earns $70 a week; he had quit school to add to the family income.

"Catching chickens is back-breaking work," said Van Hoose, who knows because he worked at it himself when he was in high school. "A crew of 10 will catch 20,000 to 25,000 chickens in a night working eight or nine hours, loading them into coops stacked on a trailer," he said.

"After working all night carring loads of squawking, flopping chickens these boys are exhausted," said Van Hoose. "I've seen them come to classes the next day too sleepy to listen. I tell them to put their heads down and take a nap."

Zotti and Van Hoose urged Jim to come back to school and talk with them. They pointed to his older fellow workers who had stayed with chicken-catching rather than school, for whom home was still a migrant camp or a rundown shack. Zotti recalled that he had dropped out of school at the 10th grade to go to work, only to realize the

dead end ahead. He now lacks only his dissertation toward his doctorate at the University of Arkansas.

Jim was impressed. "I've been thinking about it a lot since," he said. "I'm coming back to school to talk to you."

"We may not be able to hold him for more than a year or so," said Van Hoose. "But if we get him back in school, we have a chance to get him interested in going on to finish. Otherwise, it would be hopeless."

Springdale, in northwest Arkansas, has only white poverty. There are no Negro families in the town. Across the state in the middle of the eastern farmland, however, Wynne School District has tried a similar parent visitation program. Wynne is one-third Negro and two-thirds white, but the poverty statistics are almost exactly the reverse. Thirty per cent of the white children and 70 per cent of the Negro children qualify for Title I help.

Supt. M. D. Forrest began his parent visitation program last year during an August workshop for teachers. The workshop was conducted with Title I funds and this year, when the funds were running short, he considered dropping the program but the teachers insisted on holding it again. They said they were willing to participate without pay. At the last minute, a partial funding was made available and the workshop came off on schedule the last two days in August.

Wynne teachers, after picking up their lists of students for the coming year at school, went by the post office to get rural route locations, then set out to search for remote homes, some of which were many miles from paved roads.

The teachers went in teams of two or three, some of them both

white and Negro, and they visited both white and Negro homes. They learned that many children miss breakfast to catch a bus at 7 o'clock in the morning and that they must walk three-quarters of a mile or more to catch the bus. This helps to explain why attendance drops in bad weather.

Two teachers from the all-Negro Childress High School at Wynne, Mrs. LaEunice Pearson and Carlton Adams, called on a family that lived a mile off the highway on Cowley's Ridge. The tiny three-room shack housed nine children, the parents and a grandmother. A social worker's report on the family showed that the family income for the previous year, which the father earned from day work, was $1,233. Six boys share one bedroom.

"With no electricity and with six boys in one small room, there is no chance for study at night," said Mrs. Pearson. "Yet one of these boys and one of the girls in this family are both 'B' students. They have to carry their drinking water a mile and a half, but they are always neat and clean-looking at school. You can really appreciate what they do at school when you see how hard it is for them at home."

One teacher, making the rounds at Wynne, commented that a visit in and out of a poverty home provided insufficient understanding of the child's dilemma. "For him this is reality; this is what he comes home to every day," she said as she looked back at the old car without wheels in the front yard. "If there is any hope for him, it has to be at school and it will be there only if we understand what it is like for him here at home."

Wynne's program includes another phase. Parents were notified to come to school between 8 a.m. and 1 p.m. or 4 p.m. and 9 p.m. on Dec. 7 while their children were given a full holiday. Report

cards were held for the parents to pick up, and individual conferences were held with teachers. Because of the prior home visits, a high percentage of the low-income parents showed up for visits with their children's teachers. Parent participation was a little higher at the two all-Negro schools than at the three others attended mostly by whites. Some rooms at Childress elementary and high schools had as high as 90 per cent participation by mothers or fathers. Some parents saw the inside of their children's schools for the first time.

Forrest said the dropout rate had been approximately 50 per cent in the Negro school and 10 to 15 per cent in the formerly all-white Wynne High School but that the increased parent participation was making its impact. More students are staying in school to finish. He also gives credit to the young principal at Childress, Henry Akins. Akins pointed out that the dropout rate was high beginning at the ninth grade because the children were old enough to start working then and some of them had to work. He pointed out, however, that 23 of his 50 graduates last year would be going on to college this fall.

Springdale and Wynne teachers know now why students' hands are often scratched and bleeding during grape season, why so many arms and legs are covered with infected sores. They know why students start disappearing from their classes in October and November when the families move on to follow the crops farther south during the winter. They know why some children have been enrolled in as many as six or eight diffenent schools during one school term.

The Springdale Summer School for Migrant Children was the result of a study made by Bill Pate, a special programs supervisor for the

Arkansas State Department of Education, on the needs of migrant children in Arkansas. He chose Springdale as a target area because of the location of a migrant labor camp there, built in 1941 by the War Manpower Commission of the U.S. Labor Department and leased to the city of Springdale in 1947. Working closely with Supt. Thurman D. Smith and Asst. Supt. Leon Gaines, he drew up the request for the special summer program, which was approved. Smith and Gaines turned over to Zotti the job of implementing the original plans.

Crop-picking jobs around Springdale have dropped off in recent years because of the mechanical bean pickers which came into use and because of the decrease in apple and peach orchards in the area. Grapes are now the principal seasonal crop. Many parents work in canneries, a local soup plant and a grape juice plant, in addition to the chicken industry. The labor camp, which is open from April 15 to Oct. 15, had only 40 families in it at the height of the summer season although it has space for 160. Many of the families in nearby poverty areas, however, stay only until cold weather comes.

The girl with the tightly curled hair shrugged when the teacher mentioned during the home visit that she should stay in school until she got her high-school diploma. "But I know I can't go to college," she said. "Why should I finish?"

"If you make good grades, we'll find a way for you to go," the teacher said, conscious of how far away college seemed from the drab, sparsely furnished room. "There are also other things you can do after high school, such as nursing."

The girl's face lit up. "I have thought about becoming a Red Cross nurse," she said. The teacher promised to get her literature on nursing.

Back in town, Van Hoose brought his car to a sudden stop as a

motorcycle shot through an intersection in front of him. "That's one of our boys who ought to be in summer school. We are going to lose him if something isn't done. I'll go by and see him tomorrow."

The nonfederal side of Zotti's federally funded program was in action again.